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ABSTRACT

Service learning has been proposed as one strategy to empower youth, engage students, and provide real-life applications for classroom learning. One model of service learning, "The Helper Model," which was designed specifically for use with middle school students, is presented here. Data to test the model were collected from over 500 students in grades 5 to 8 over a two-year period in an attempt to identify areas of student growth during Service Learning. Results indicate that students perceived growth in several areas. Areas of potential student growth identified after extensive analysis were (1) School-Related; (2) Work Preparedness; and (3) Psychosocial. Other findings, ongoing research, and future directions are discussed. In general, the findings support the belief that students who participated in The Helper Model of Service Learning became actively engaged in a meaningful experience which they believed provided opportunities for career development, improved interpersonal and nurturing skills, self growth, learning specific tasks, and understanding the practical component of education. (EMK)

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SERVICE LEARNING
A SUPPORT FOR PERSONAL GROWTH DURING ADOLESCENCE

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SERVICE LEARNING

A SUPPORT FOR PERSONAL GROWTH DURING ADOLESCENCE

Service Learning has been proposed as one strategy to empower youth, engage students in their own learning and to provide real-life applications for classroom learning (e.g., Alliance for Service Learning Education Reform, 1993; Conrad & Hedin, 1991; Perrone, 1993). Through Service Learning young people actively participate in the community, providing services such as assisting at a Day Care Center, working at a Senior Center or participating on a school newspaper. Unlike community service, Service Learning also involves scheduled opportunities for students to engage in reflection. During reflection, students discuss and evaluate their service actions and interactions with others as well as try to understand the relationship between their service experiences and possible future actions, societal needs, and curricular areas.

Many in education, including advocates for alternative approaches to juvenile justice and youth program specialists, as well as the President and the United States Congress, are endorsing service as a way to reconnect youth to the community, to motivate youngsters to learn, to provide needed service in urban areas, and to save the environment (e.g., Hedin, 1987; Conrad & Hedin, 1991). Theoretical writings, anecdotal data from teachers and students, as well as selective research have all reinforced the notion that Service Learning can facilitate positive growth in students. Students learn not only about the particular service activity in which they are engaged, but also experience increased personal growth and self-awareness (e.g., Hamilton & Fenzel, 1988; Hamilton & Zeldin, 1987). The areas of reported growth are numerous and varied, ranging from improvement of academic skills (e.g., Hedin, 1987) to increases in self-esteem, confidence, and responsibility taking (e.g., Conrad & Hedin, 1991; Newmann & Rutter, 1983).

Despite growing attention to the potential benefits of community involvement, most studies have focused on older adolescents, high school students or college age groups (e.g., Conrad & Hedin, 1981; Serow, 1991b; Newmann & Rutter, 1983; Hamilton & Zeldin, 1987; Serow, Ciechalski & Daye, 1990). There has been little work to investigate the benefits of participating in Service Learning during early adolescence. This omission overlooks a critical period for developing the skills and abilities needed in high school and beyond, as well as for beginning to define a personal sense of self. Early adolescence is a time of tremendous but uneven physical, psychological and cognitive growth. Scales (1991) outlines seven developmental needs which are particularly pressing during this age period: positive social interaction with adults and peers; structure and clear limits; physical activity; creative expression; competence and achievement; meaningful participation in families, schools and 5

communities; and opportunities for self-definition. Service Learning can provide young adolescents with opportunities to be actively involved in decision making, engaged in an activity which is valued by others, and to establish personal and positive social relationships with students, teachers and others. These are experiences often lacking during early adolescents (Eccles, 1993). Involvement in such activities may satisfy some of the developmental needs pressing during this age period.

In this paper we describe a model of Service Learning developed specifically for use with middle school students -- The Helper Model. Over the past 13 years the National Helpers Network, Inc.[1], developed the Helper Model of Service Learning. By the fall of 1991 the Network was regularly receiving requests for materials to assess the Helper Program's impact on students. At the same time there was a growing demand by policy makers to document the impact and value of Service Learning. This study evolved in an attempt to address these needs.

The data presented in this paper were collected during the academic years 1992-93 and 1993-94 in an attempt to identify areas of student growth during Service Learning. The focus was on students self-reported behaviors and beliefs. The work was exploratory. It began as an attempt to provide Helper Programs with a short questionnaire which could be used to assess student growth. The work was driven by the needs of these practitioners. A review of related research with older adolescents provided guidance in selecting the initial questions. This work lead to the development of a conceptual framework for examining student change and growth through Service Learning during early adolescence. As the framework became clearer the survey also has evolved into a more comprehensive assessment tool, which is still under revision. This framework and the assessment tool will be applied in a comprehensive research study proposed for 1994-95.

The Helper Model of Service Learning

The Helper Model has certain fundamental requirements which distinguish it from a more general model of Service Learning (National Helpers Network, 1991a, 1991b, 1994). Key among these is that the Helper Model was developed specifically for middle school age students. The structure and content of reflection activities, service tasks, seminars, as well as student and teacher materials are specifically designed for the middle school student. To help meet the developmental needs of this age group, the Helper Model requires that Service Learning be a well defined and on-going part of the school's curriculum. A student's service involvement must last a minimum of 10 weeks during which

1 The National Helpers Network, formerly known as the National Center for Service Learning in Early Adolescents, provides training, technical assistance, and materials to practitioners, policy makers and institutions engaged in implementing the Helper Model of service learning. Its Clearinghouse provides descriptions of model programs, listings of materials and publications, and listings of individuals and organizations with expertise in related fields.

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time service is linked to other areas through weekly periods of reflection. Reflection, as defined by the Helper Model, involves thoughtful discussion, problem solving and planning which is closely tied to the objectives the school has established for the program. The objectives include clear cognitive and affective learning goals usually reflecting the reasons a service program was introduced and supported by a school. For example, goals might include increased knowledge and acceptance of senior citizens. Linked with these goals are specific service outcomes for students and ways for assessing these outcomes. The assessments may range from informal discussions with students to structured assignments. However, they are explicitly identified by the school. The school is expected to reinforce to students the value of their service work. The service which young adolescents perform as part of the Helper Program must be meaningful work which meets a recognized community need (e.g., assisting in a day care center, surveying and reporting about environmental issues in the community). It is critical that the work be perceived by the students, teachers and community as valuable and worthwhile. Finally, as part of the Helper Model there is a specific person in charge (called a program leader) who is actively involved with the students and remains involved throughout the students' service experience. This person serves as the liaison to sites, parents and the community. Responsibility for the daily management and supervision of the Service Learning program must be given priority, and the job assigned to one person, rather than shared by several individuals. Table 1 summarizes the elements of a quality Helper Program.

Sample & Methodology

Over a two year period (1992-93 and 1993-94) data were collected from over 500 students in grades five to eight. Approximately equal numbers of boys and girls participated from five different schools. At each school Service Learning was required of students in at least one grade. Although the schools differed in how they instituted the Helper Model (e.g., weekly for a year, daily for 12 weeks), all met the requirements for a quality program. Between two and thirty-two students worked at each service site. The sites varied from a senior citizen center to beautifying a local subway station. The students in the sample worked at over 50 service sites, including day care centers, senior citizens homes, and community action projects.

In the early fall 1992 one urban New York City School administered the first pilot version of the Student Service Learning Survey (Hecht & Schine, 1994). Two hundred two students completed the four page survey which asked for students' perceptions about themselves, Service Learning, and school. The survey included five opened questions and six checklist-type questions. In October the survey was revised and administered at two additional schools, one in Ohio and one in New York City with 52 and 32 students respectively. In the spring, post surveys

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Table 1

Elements of a Quality Helper Program

* service continues for at least 10 weeks

* training and ongoing reflection, with guidance, to provide students with the skills, knowledge and understand they will need to meet their responsibilities;

* a skilled, understanding adult facilitator (Program Leader)

* a voice for youth in planning

* group development and trust-building

* service performed will fill a real need; sustained involvement over time

* a clear understanding among young people, the school or sponsoring organization, and the placement sit supervisors

* clear service and learning outcomes

* a firm element in the school's or community-based organization's schedule; not a "hit or miss" program

were administered to students at all schools. The post surveys included two additional open-ended questions and six checklist-type questions.

The survey was again revised before the fall 1993. During 1993-94 three schools participated. One New York City school which participated in 1992-93 continued for the next year. Two new schools were added, one in New York City and one in a northern suburb of New York. Two hundred seventy four students participated. Of these, 175 students received the same pre and post surveys. The remaining 96 students completed either the same pre or same post, but a different second form. At one school different students participated each semester, allow for questions and item formats to be tried out.

The 1993-94 version of the Student Service Learning Survey included Likert-type, checklist, and open-ended questions statements intended to examine students' motivations for participating in Service Learning, their expectations about the experience, and their attitudes toward school. Students complete pre and post versions of the survey which were almost identical,

except for the inclusion of questions about reflection in the post-survey.

The sections of the surveys of interest in this report are:

* Responses to four open-ended questions including (included in both 1992-93 and 1993-94 surveys):
  - .How do you think Service Learning will (did) change you? (post 1993, pre & post 1993-94)
  - .What can you do to help your community?
  - .What will you most remember about Service Learning? (1993-94 only)
  - .What do you expect to be (was) the hardest thing about Service Learning?

* Rankings of six reasons why students would want to participate in Service Learning (options appeared as individual yes/no checks on 1992-93 survey; as rankings on 1993-94 survey):
  - .To make new friends
  - .To make community better
  - .Because friends are doing it
  - .For a grade or credit
  - .To feel good
  - .To get career experience

* Student ratings (Very True/Somewhat True/Not at all True; or Helps a lot/Helps a little/Does not help/ Don't take course/Don't know) of whether Service Learning helped them in:
  - . Ten personal growth areas (e.g., being less afraid to try new things; learn to care about others, know how to improve my community); and
  - . Six subject/classroom areas (English/Reading, Math, Science, Social Studies/History, Art/Music and Foreign Language).

  (both appeared on both 1992-93 and 1993-94 surveys)

* Likert-type questions concerning student beliefs toward school and Service Learning, and involvement in other helping activities (only on 1993-94 survey).

Results

One objective of this work was to identify areas of student growth after participating in Service Learning. Results from the first year (academic year 1993-94) indicated that students perceived growth in several areas. Content analyses of the open-ended questions and descriptive analyses of the forced-choice items were examined. Student responses to the three open-ended questions included both socially acceptable and socially unacceptable responses. Two researchers independently developed categories for each of the questions. The categories were compared and found to be similar. Differences were primarily due

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to one researcher using greater levels of specificity for coding responses. The categories were reviewed by staff of the National Helpers Network for their relevance and meaning.

Tables 2 through 4 present the number and percentage of responses coded within each category. Nine categories were used to group responses to the question "How did participating in Service Learning change you?" This question was not asked as part of the pre-survey. Although 25% of the students reported that participation in Service Learning did not change them, the majority of students reported some form of change. Responses included learning about ones self (16%), learning a specific skill or job (7%) as well as learning related to the specific service site (8%).

Categories for student responses to the question "What can you do to help your community?" were coded into ten categories. On both the pre and post surveys the majority of students reported that they could help the community by "cleaning up or not littering." Recycling was frequently reported on the pre survey, but not the post survey. The miscellaneous categories included more than a third of the students' response to the pre-survey and approximately a quarter of the post survey responses. This may reflect students lack of awareness of ways to help the community prior to Service Learning.

Student responses to the question "What do you expect to be (was) the hardest thing about Service Learning tended to focus upon the specific service task. As shown in Table 4, 18% of the responses to the pre-survey and 25% to the post-survey suggested that doing the task was the hardest part of Service Learning. Other categories also reflected concerns about aspects of the service task (e.g., working with kids; talking in front of others) A small number of responses were coded into categories related to student perceptions of their self (e.g. being depended upon, being patient).

Based upon a review of the 1992-93 data, five possible areas of growth were identified:

1. opportunities related to career development; such as "having a job;"
2. improvement of interpersonal and nurturing skills such as "helping others;"
3. becoming a better person through personal/self growth, such as "becoming more responsible," and "becoming more confident;"
4. doing or learning a specific task (unlike career development, this involves doing one specific task, such as recycling);
5. school related learning, that is, learning which helps students do or learn better in school.

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Table 2

Number and Percentage of Student Responses by Category to the Question:

How Did Participating In Service Learning Changed You? (1992-1993)

Categories	Post Survey (N=156)
Did not change me	39 (25%)
Learned about self	25 (16%)
Learned to work with others/help people	19 (12%)
Learned about community	17 (11%)
Became more responsible	12 (8%)
Learned something specific site	12 (8%)
Learned a specific skill/work	11 (7%)
Miscellaneous	28 (18%)
Don't know	6 (4%)

Note: Question only asked in post-survey
78 students did not answer this question.
Responses may be coded into more than one category, therefore the sum of the responses may not equal the number of students.

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Table 3

Number and Percentage of Student Responses by Category to the Question:

What Can You Do to Help Your Community?
(1992-1993)

Categories	Pre Survey (N=336)	Post Survey (N=234)
Clean up/not litter	102 (30%)	90 (38%)
Recycle	60 (18%)	
Care for others	39 (12%)	18 (8%)
Do community work/volunteer	30 (9%)	5 (2%)
Nothing	5 (1%)	3 (1%)
Stop crime/violence	3 (1%)	12 (5%)
Plant/garden	5 (2%)	
Drug education	4 (2%)	
Miscellaneous	109 (32%)	42 (18%)
Don't know	6 (1%)	12 (5%)

Note: 19 students did not answer this question on the pre-survey and 61 students on the post survey.
Responses may be coded into more than one category, therefore the sum of the responses may not equal the number of students.

Table 4

Number and Percentage of Student Responses by Category to the Question:

What Do You Expect to be the Hardest Thing About Service Learning? (1992-1993)

Categories	Pre Survey (N=336)	Post Survey (N=234)
Doing/learning the task/work	51 (15%)	40 (17%)
Nothing	40 (12%)	48 (20%)
Getting along w/ people	21 (6%)	
Walking/traveling in the community	17 (5%)	
Dealing with people	13 (4%)	
Working with kids	11 (3%)	
Talking in front of others	7 (2%)	
Helping others	6 (2%)	18 (7%)
Motivating others	4 (1%)	
Getting the people to listen	4 (1%)	
To be depended on	3 (1%)	
Dealing with death	2 (1%)	
Time commitment		9 (4%)
Talking with others		9 (4%)
Being patient		3 (1%)
Acting appropriately for the job		2 (1%)
Miscellaneous	94 (28%)	34 (15%)
Don't know		5 (2%)

Note: 46 students did not answer this question on the pre-survey and 76 students on the post survey.
Responses may be coded into more than one category, therefore the sum of the responses may not equal the number of students.

Aspects of the category of personal/self growth were later incorporated into the category of interpersonal and nurturing skills. This expanded category was renamed psychosocial growth. It included not only caring behaviors, but also perceived self-efficacy. The separate growth area of doing or learning a specific task and "responsibility" as part of personal/self growth were dropped. Examples of ways students reported learning new tasks and increased responsibility were easily identified from student responses. However, they took on different meanings depending upon the context of the response. For example, when students became more responsible in a school related context they reported attending school more or remembering to do their homework. In a career development setting responsibility was exhibited by students who reported the importance of being on time at the service site or of being "needed" by the people at the service site. In the psychosocial area, students who reported greater self responsibility reported the importance of being depended upon and caring for others.

The areas of personal growth are therefore characterized:

* School-related (achievement, attendance, beliefs);
* Preparedness for the school to work transition (career development, problem solving and listening skills, and worked related responsibility);
* Psychosocial (empathy, and self-efficacy)

Results of a factor analysis of the 11 Likert-type belief items administered in 1993-94 provide support for the revised areas. These Likert-type items were not written to assess a specific construct, but rather they were gathered from a review of the literature and discussions with students, teachers, program leaders and Service Learning experts. They represent a range of attitudes students often hold and included statements such as "The best thing about Service Learning is getting out of school for a while," and "Service Learning is a way to learn to use what is learned in school." An exploratory principal axis factor analysis, followed by a varimax rotation revealed a two factor solution which accounted for approximately 30% of the variance. The factors were characterized as a belief that Service Learning will prepare students for the "real-world" and a belief that Service Learning is an interesting and valuable addition to school-based learning. Scales were established by including statements with factor loading greater than .35. Alpha reliability coefficients were .80 and .56 respectively. The two factor solution corresponds to the growth areas, preparedness for the school to work transition, and the value of Service Learning in the school and for the student personally. Additional items have been written in an attempt to separate the school and psychosocial components and are currently being tested.

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Analysis of the 1993-94 open-ended questions provided examples of student responses within each of the three areas of the framework. Examples are drawn from responses to the question "How do you feel Service Learning changed you?"

School related School related growth from Service Learning was less often exhibited in student responses to open-ended questions. Yet, some responses indicted a connection to school. For example, Service Learning helped change one boy "by respecting other student and stop fighting" For another girl "It will make me love coming to school everyday feeling good about myself"

Work preparedness Students who participated in Service Learning developed an increased awareness of career opportunities and the "real world." For some students it was a general awareness. For others it was an increased awareness of work which is enjoyable. For example as one student stated "it changed me by teaching and showing that I like working with kids." Another student noted "It changed me because so far I've got experience with seniors and I might be a person that works with them" For others it was viewed as a way to prepare them for the future "It made me ready for the real world."

Psychosocial Skills Students reported they became more caring and self-confident after participating in Service Learning and reported more caring related behaviors. One student reported she will most remember "That even if your young you can help people that are bigger than you." Another student reported "It changed me by caring for others and helping them in everything" Sometimes student responses indicated personal growth, such as "It changed me a lot because I was afraid or scare to talk to new people or friend," or "It made me more confident about myself and others"

We are beginning to examine differences in student growth across the three growth areas of the study. Preliminary analyses suggest that students differ in the growth areas which are most salient for them. For example, student rankings of six reasons they would do Service Learning (1993-94) indicated that students varied in what they perceived as the most important reasons for doing Service Learning. With the exception of "My friends are doing it," the six options were endorsed by approximately equal percentages of students. None of the students stated the most important reason for participating in Service Learning was because friends were doing it. Responses were less varied in rankings of the least important reason. Fifty-six percent reported the least important reason for participating was "Because my friends are doing it," and less than 10% reported "It makes me feel good."

Students strongly agreed that Service Learning helped them in all 10 personal growth areas and to a lesser degrees in the six academic subject. When students were asked whether Service Learning would help them "Do well or learn" in the subject areas, approximately 70% indicated it would help a lot or somewhat. The strongest connection was with English, although 20% still

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reported that Service Learning would not help them. The percentage of students reporting a connection between Service Learning and academic subjects was stronger than expected since service learning has not been integrated across the curriculum at any of the schools.

For most of the open-ended questions, differences were found across service sites, for both the pre and post data. For example, students who were in a tutoring program tended to state the way they could help the community was by helping children. Although not fully examined, growth appears to be mediated by the specific service experience. The service experience appears to give students a framework from which to view the "helping" world. This suggests the need for further work to explore the impact of the context in which service is performed. Most studies report that key features of successful Service Learning experiences concern the program structure and characteristics of sites where service is performed. Differences among service settings and even programs are often cited as one reason research in this area is difficult to conduct and results are often inconclusive (Hedin, 1987; Hamilton & Fenzel, 1988). Service can incorporate a wide range of activities (e.g., child care, tutoring, working with elderly, cleaning a park), and even within a given activity, a wide variety of tasks can be performed (e.g., preparing materials, interacting with others, supervising, cleaning-up).

Conclusions

Analyses of the data were on-going throughout the two years of the study. Student survey data were examined to identify areas in which students expect or experience growth. In general, the findings support the belief that students who participated in The Helper Model of Service Learning became actively engaged in a meaningful experience which they believed provided opportunities for personal growth in several areas. Although the students who participated in this study were required to do Service Learning, the areas of reported growth varied. This suggests that, as in many subject areas, what students learn from an experience varies in spite of the fact that participation is required.

Although research suggests that middle school students are at particular risk for becoming disengaged from school, little work has been done to examine Service Learning with young adolescents. The present study represents initial attempts to identify areas of growth which might be expected. A larger study is planned for 1995 through 1997 based upon the framework developed from this work. If the benefits of Service Learning are to engage students in learning and to help them establish positive interpersonal relationships and attitudes, we must begin to understand how students think about and view Service Learning. The results of this study provide guidance for considering the ways students perceive Service Learning and a preliminary framework for describing and exploring student growth. Although the study focuses upon Helper Program, the results should be generalizable to other Service Learning programs.

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